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# Leibniz's Conciliatory Account of Substance

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## 0. Introduction

Leibniz's commentators have long been divided over how to best interpret his views on substance and fundamental ontology. Defenders of realist interpretations have typically seen his metaphysics as being driven principally by a corporeal account of substance and a metaphysical analysis that bottoms out in extended, organic unities.<sup>1</sup> Defenders of idealist interpretations have typically seen Leibniz's metaphysics as being driven principally by an immaterial account of substance and a metaphysical analysis that bottoms out in immaterial, mind-like simples.<sup>2</sup> Intense scrutiny of Leibniz's texts and arguments over the past twenty-five years or so has, remarkably, only seemed to lend further support to *both* of these strikingly different accounts. This puzzling fact has recently led some commentators to suppose that Leibniz was of two minds about the fundamental ontology of the created world: either he changed his view on the nature of substance, or, for a long stretch of his career, he simply did not have "a settled position on the matter" as to "whether it's all mind or soul, or whether there is something in the world that goes beyond" (Garber 2005, 106).<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I'd like to offer an alternative account of Leibniz's views on substance and fundamental ontology. The essay is divided into four main sections. The first section sketches two traditional, rival accounts of the paradigmatic nature of created substances. The second section suggests that Leibniz's initially puzzling textual treatment of substance begins to make better sense when viewed against the backdrop of that traditional dispute and his own overarching conciliatorism. The third section focuses on Leibniz's attempt to establish

1. Support for this approach to Leibniz's treatment of substance may be found in Broad (1975), Garber (1985; 1996; 2009), Robinet (1986), Jolley (1986), Arthur (1998), Hartz (1998; 2007), Loftson (1999), Phemister (1999; 2005), Fichant (2003), Bolton (2004), Hartz and Wilson (2005), and Loftson and Arthur (2006).
2. Support for this approach may be found in Sleight (1990), Adams (1994; 1996), Baxter (1995), Rutherford (1995 and 2008a), Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1999), and Look and Rutherford (2007, xix–lxxii).
3. Support for this approach may be found in Wilson (1999), Garber (2004; 2005; 2009, 382–388), and Hartz (2007); see also Lodge (2005).

suitable referents for one traditional view of substance. It argues that, for Leibniz, gross bodies are (materially) constituted by organic unities answering the essential demands of an "Aristotelian" conception of substance. The fourth section focuses on Leibniz's attempt to establish suitable referents for the other traditional view of substance. It argues that, for Leibniz, organic unities are in turn (materially) constituted by immaterial simples answering the essential demands of a "Platonic" conception of substance. Careful attention to Leibniz's metaphysical commitments, the specific nature of his conciliatorism, and the demands of both traditional views of substance suggests that Leibniz need not be read as offering an exclusive defense of corporeal substance realism nor of immaterial substance idealism. Nor need he be read as being deeply torn, at a time or over time, between two radically opposed metaphysical schemes. Instead, he may be seen as characteristically seeking to reconcile two traditionally rival conceptions of substance, as aiming to reveal a deeper, hidden truth that might be embraced by both sides of an age-old dispute.

### 1. Two Traditional Conceptions of Substance

The traditional notion of substance might be thought of as having both an intensional and an extensional aspect. Its intensional aspect includes a fairly large and somewhat loose family of connotations such as, for example, being a subject of predication, admitting of rigorous identity conditions through change, being a center of natural activity, and enjoying a non-accidental unity.<sup>4</sup> The extensional aspect of the notion of substance is fixed by a smaller family of commonly invoked paradigms including living animals, human beings, and God.<sup>5</sup> Among such paradigms, the example of human beings appears to have exerted the greatest influence on thinking about the fundamental ontology of the created world in the early modern period, for, unlike

God, human beings served as examples not just of substances but of *created* substances,<sup>6</sup> and, unlike animals, human beings remained uncontroversial examples of substances even among those who could suppose that animals are nothing more than cleverly arranged bits of matter on an ontological par with watches and windmills.<sup>7</sup> Leibniz fits squarely in this tradition, drawing heavily upon human beings, including Adam, Judas, and himself, for uncontroversial examples of created substances, and insisting, in his correspondence with de Volder, on searching for a notion of substance "according to which you and I and others are counted as substances" (G II 232).

Reliance on the stalwart example of human beings, however, encouraged a long-standing divide in philosophical conceptions of substance. On what we might think of as a characteristically Platonic view of human beings, you and I are essentially immaterial minds, spirits, or souls merely related to material bodies.<sup>8</sup> On this account of substance,

4. For a helpful overview of the intensional themes that Leibniz associates with the notion of substance, see Rutherford (1995, 133–137).
5. For a helpful overview of the concept of substance and its history, as well as an extensive bibliography of additional sources, see Robinson (2008).

6. Indeed, although Descartes famously insists that, strictly speaking, "there is only one substance ... namely God", many Scholastics thought that only created beings could possibly be substances (Descartes 1996, 8:24). Thus, for example, Aquinas argues that "the definition of substance is understood as that which has a quiddity to which it belongs to be not in another. Now this is not appropriate to God, for he has no quiddity save his being. In no way, then, is God in the genus of substance" ([Book I, Section 25] 1975, 128).
7. For a classic discussion in this vein, see Descartes's *Treatise on Man* (1996, 11:119–215), but see also Descartes's letter to More of 5 February 1649 (1996, 5:275–279). The controversial status of animals is also reflected in Leibniz's frequently conditional remarks about them. See, for example, from his correspondence with Arnauld, the draft of his letter of 28 November/8 December 1686 (G II 72/LA 89) and his letter of 9 October 1687 (G II 120/LA 154). (A list of abbreviations for Leibniz's works is provided at the end of the main text.)
8. In what follows, the names "Platonic" and "Aristotelian" are used generically to denote two broad pictures of the fundamental nature of human beings commonly associated with Plato and Aristotle; the actual views of Plato and Aristotle, as well as the actual views of self-identifying Platonists and Aristotelians, are, of course, far more complicated. For discussion of the relationship between the soul and body in Plato, see especially the canonical dialogue *Phaedo*, *passim* (1989, 41–98) as well as the disputed dialogue *Alcibiades I*, 130a–d (1922, 103–135). The association of the "Platonic" view of substance with Plato might be due in part to the fourth-century Syrian Christian Nemesius of Emesa, who suggested that Plato "did not hold that an animal is made up of a soul and body, but that it is the soul using the body and (as it were) wearing

I am my soul, and my body ranks on the order of a mere possession or tool. Thus, for a characteristic example, Augustine, in his *On the Customs of the Catholic Church*, poses the question of whether “man himself” is a “body alone”, a “soul alone”, or a composite “of soul and body”. He concedes that “although the soul and body are two things, neither would be called a ‘man’ if the other did not exist (for neither would the body be a man if the soul did not exist, nor in turn would the soul be a man if the body were not animated by it)”. He goes on to argue, however, that “we might [nonetheless] call nothing but the soul the ‘man’, but on account of the body it rules, just as we call a rider not the horse and the man together, but only the man, yet [only] insofar as he is suited to governing the horse” (1844–1855, 1: 4, 6). That this represents Augustine’s most considered view is implied later, when, in the same work, he writes “Therefore man is ... a rational, moral and earthly soul using a body”, a conclusion that itself echoes his definition of mind, in *On the Size of the Soul*, as “a certain substance partaking in reason and fitted to ruling the body” (1844–1855, 32: 13, 22).<sup>9</sup> Although developed in different ways by different thinkers, the core view expressed here by Augustine represents one standard way of thinking about human beings and, by implication, about created substances — a way that was still very much alive in Leibniz’s own era and on display in the works of his contemporaries such as Malebranche and Arnold Geulincx.<sup>10</sup>

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the body”. For references and discussion of Nemesis of Emesa’s somewhat surprising influence, see Pasnau (2002, 78).

9. I have followed English translations of both texts made by Paul Vincent Spade. For a helpful overview of the themes of this paragraph, see his (1985, chapter 14).
10. Thus, Malebranche, for example, writes in *The Search After Truth*, “The soul ... is that I who thinks, who senses, who wills — it is the substance in which are found all the modifications of which I have an inner sensation ...” (1997, 49). Similarly, Geulincx suggests that, while consideration of the body is important for ethics, our true metaphysical selves are to be identified with simple, immaterial, thinking substances (1891–1893, 219). Of course, in many passages Descartes himself seems to support a broadly Platonic view, as, for example, when he writes in the *Sixth Meditation* that “I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing”, adding, “it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it” (1996,

According to what we might think of as a characteristically Aristotelian account of human beings, you and I are most deeply and naturally *unions* of minds and bodies. On this account, the soul and body are naturally suited to one another in such a way that even if the soul can exist apart from the body, it can do so only in a miraculous, crippled, or unnatural state. For Aristotelians, I am not naturally identical to just my soul but rather to the union of my soul and my material body.<sup>11</sup> Thus, to take a prominent example, Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, insists that although it is possible for the soul to exist separated from the body, it nonetheless “belongs to the soul by virtue of itself to be united to the body” so that “just as a light body remains light even when it has been separated from its proper place and retains nevertheless its aptitude and inclination for its proper place, so the human soul retains its being when it has been separated from the body, and it still has the aptitude and natural inclination for union with the body” ([ST I.76.1, ad 6] 1981, 1:372). The implications of this “natural inclination” are brought out in an especially clear manner in his commentary on St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (15: 17–19). There, after reaffirming that “[t]he union of body and soul is certainly a natural one, and any separation of soul from body goes against its nature”, Aquinas declares plainly that “the soul is not the whole human being, only part of one: my soul is not me. So that even if [my] soul achieves well-being in another life, that doesn’t mean I do or any other human being does” (Aquinas 1993, 192). Aquinas makes the same point in his *Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences*, writing:

Abraham’s soul is not, strictly speaking, Abraham himself; it is rather a part of him (and so too for others). So Abraham’s soul’s having life would not suffice for Abraham’s being alive. ... The life of the whole compound

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7:78/1985, 2:54, but see also 1996 3:690–695/1985, 3:226–229). For a more detailed and fine-grained discussion of these issues than is possible here, see Thiel (2011).

11. On Aristotle’s understanding of the “separability” of the rational soul and body, see *De Anima* I.i.403a3–15, II.i, and III.iv (2002, 3–4, 8–10, 57–59).

is required: soul and body. ([Book IV, 43.1.1.1. ad 2] 1852–1873, vol. 7)<sup>12</sup>

Although also developed in different ways by different thinkers, the core view expressed here by Aquinas also represents a once standard way of thinking about human beings and, by implication, about created substances — a way that was also still very much alive in Leibniz's own era and defended vigorously both by later Scholastics, including Francisco Suárez, the Coimbra Commentators, and Eustachius of St. Paul, as well as by important figures well outside the Scholastic tradition, such as Arnauld.<sup>13</sup>

As one might imagine, disputes over the fundamental nature of human beings were not, in earlier times, only of intellectual or “philosophical” interest. They took on a very broad significance in virtue of being intertwined, in particular, with religious doctrines that were themselves an endless source of controversy in the medieval and early modern eras. A feel for the resulting tensions is perhaps most easily obtained through consideration of the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead.<sup>14</sup> According to standard interpretation, the

12. For additional texts and helpful discussion of this point — as well as its implications for the doctrine of bodily resurrection — see especially Pasnau (2002, 361–393).

13. For discussion and texts in connection with the later Scholastics, see Roze-  
mond (1998, 139–171). In an interesting passage from his objections to the  
*Meditations*, Arnauld explicitly rejects the “Platonic” view discussed just  
above (in spite of its association with Augustine), writing:

It seems ... that the argument [of the *Second Meditation*] proves too much, and takes us back to the Platonic view (which M. Descartes nonetheless rejects) that nothing corporeal belongs to our essence, so that man is merely a rational soul and the body merely a vehicle for the soul — a view which gives rise to the definition of man as “a soul which makes use of a body”. (1996, 7:203/1984, 2:143)

14. On the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead, see Grant (1948), Segal (2004), and Setzer (2004). It is perhaps worth noting that just as views on the Resurrection crosscut the early modern Protestant/Catholic divide, so too did broadly Platonic and Aristotelian accounts of substance. Leibniz therefore

doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead commits all Christians to the view that human beings are created with both souls and bodies that are separated at the time of death and joyously reunited at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. So understood, however, the doctrine only exacerbated the disagreement between Platonists and Aristotelians. While friends of the Platonic account could find *prima facie* support for their view in the suggestion that the soul can exist without the body, they were hard-pressed to explain why, upon the Second Coming, we should be reunited with our mortal coils, and even harder-pressed to explain why this should be construed as a cause for rejoicing. Conversely, while friends of the Aristotelian account could make better sense of our current state of union, and why we should welcome the return of our bodies upon the Second Coming of Christ, they faced difficulties in explaining the soul's separated state and capacities between earthly death and the Day of Judgment.<sup>15</sup> Similar tensions naturally arose in connection with other Church doctrines as well — especially in connection with doctrines that commonly take human beings as an explanatory analogy, such as the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist.<sup>16</sup> The resulting controversies

could not have simply assumed that his Protestant interlocutors would be Platonists and that his Catholic interlocutors would be Aristotelians, as he would have discovered at any rate very quickly from his correspondence with Arnauld (*cf.* Garber 1996, 204; Adams 1994, 121).

15. It is worth noting that Leibniz insists throughout his career that every soul is always embodied and, conversely, that every organic body always has a soul (A VI.iii.158–159; see also A VI.ii 74; A VI.ii.518/DSR 76; GM III 560/AG 170; G IV 480/AG 140–141; NE Preface, 58; G II 251/AG 176; G II 253/AG 178). Through this defiance of standard church doctrine, Leibniz takes — not incidentally, I think — a significant step towards reducing the distance between the Aristotelian and Platonic accounts of substance by effectively restricting the available options: created substances must be either souls/substantial forms always enjoying bodies, or unions always having souls/substantial forms, or, of course, both.

16. For an entry point into Leibniz's handling of the mysteries of faith, see Antonazza (2007), Goldenbaum (2002; 1999), Fouke (1992), and Dascal (1987); for an entry point into contemporary philosophical discussions of the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Eucharist, see, respectively, McCall and Rea (2010), Swinburne (1994), and Dummett (1987).



served to align and divide believers in complex, often unpredictable ways. To take an extreme but obviously relevant example, Leibniz himself appears, in his famous correspondence with Des Bosses, to go out of his way to assert that Lutherans, such as himself, do not need to commit themselves to an interpretation of the Eucharist that is reliant upon the existence of genuine unions (LDB 152–153). Nonetheless, elsewhere, and throughout his career, Leibniz also insists on an interpretation of the Incarnation that takes for granted the existence of a genuine union between human minds and human bodies (A VI.i.532–535; A VI.iv.2294–2297; G VI.81).<sup>17</sup> Such interlocking doctrinal and metaphysical differences served to guarantee that the seemingly rarified and purely philosophical notion of substance would in fact take on far-ranging theological — and ultimately practical, social, and political — implications throughout the early modern period.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. A Conciliatory Approach to Substance

Leibniz's own views on substance are best approached, I think, against the backdrop of the dispute just sketched and what we might call his own overarching conciliatorism — that is, his general tendency to try to promote reconciliation between competing religious sects and philosophical traditions. In order to better see how Leibniz's overarching conciliatorism intersects with his views on substance, it may be helpful to begin by highlighting two related but distinguishable “pillars” that help to structure his overall conciliatorism.

The first pillar, what we might call Leibniz's *theological irenicism*, may itself be thought of as involving three defining commitments. First, like most of his predecessors and contemporaries, Leibniz takes it for granted that, within its own proper domain, philosophy must be an objective science capable of establishing truths with certainty.

17. For discussion of Leibniz's views on union and *vinculum substantiale*, see Look (2000; 2004) and Look and Rutherford (2007, xxxviii–lxxii). For discussion of Leibniz's views on the Incarnation, see Antognazza (2011; 2007).

18. For entry points into this aspect of Leibniz's era, see Antognazza (2008) and Lutz (1982).

Thus, for example, he begins his *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason* by affirming human reason's ability to link together truths that “the human mind can attain naturally without being aided by the light of faith” (PD 1/H 73; see also NE IV.xvii.*passim*; A VI.iv.2341/DA 239). Second, he also upholds, however, a traditional distinction between truths that can be known by unaided human reason and experience, and truths that are “above reason” and can only be known on the basis of revelation (Grua 67–68/DA 425; see also Aquinas 1981, 1–7). Thus, while allowing that there are many truths of mathematics and natural philosophy that we can hope to understand through ordinary reasoning and sensory experience, Leibniz also grants that there are other truths, such as those concerning the nature of the Trinity, the Eucharist, and the Resurrection of the Dead, that we can only hope to understand through divine testimony (NE IV.xvii.23; see also PD 23/H 88; A IV.iv.582/DA 326). Finally, third, Leibniz holds the common — although certainly not uncontested — view that revealed truths must nonetheless be consistent with mundane truths. He thus forcefully insists that “all that which can be refuted in a sound and conclusive manner cannot but be false” and pointedly advises that “neither in divine nor in created matters should contradictory propositions be admitted” (PD 5/H 76; A VI.iv.2341; see also PD 23/H 88/NE IV.xviii/A II.i.171; Grua 62/DA 420; Grua 63/DA 422). These three commitments together represent a core aspect of Leibniz's overarching conciliatorism insofar as they allow him to insist that there are philosophical truths that everyone must accept while still granting that there may nonetheless be irresolvable differences of opinion that — as long as they are consistent with truths that can be conclusively established — should be tolerated. Although often in the background, this aspect of Leibniz's overarching conciliatorism comes to the surface explicitly in his ambitious irenic program for reuniting the divided Christian sects of his time. The aim of that program, in brief, is to supply a single, coherent metaphysics that is consistent with the views of all viable, competing Christian sects, with the hope of setting the stage for the mutual toleration of whatever

irresolvable differences might remain (A VI.i.494–500/L 109–115; see also A VI.i.501–517). While long overlooked, this aspect of Leibniz's thinking has recently received much helpful attention, with Maria Rosa Antognazza arguing, for example, that Leibniz's irenic program "provides a kind of Ariadne's thread for those who wish to reconstruct the unity underlying Leibniz's labyrinthine intellectual odyssey" (2008, 90).<sup>19</sup>

The second pillar, what we might refer to as Leibniz's *philosophical eclecticism*, concerns more specifically his approach to the set of philosophical truths that he believes can, in principle, be established conclusively. In this aspect of his conciliatorism, Leibniz was clearly influenced by the views of his early mentor Jakob Thomasius. Thomasius's brand of eclecticism encouraged both the study of a wide range of traditions, including Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Mechanism, as well as the incorporation and acknowledgement of the views of a broad spectrum of earlier and contemporary writers (Mercer 2001, 32–39). One thus finds throughout Leibniz's writings key notions inspired by past thinkers, including, for example, the notions of form, entelechy, and conatus, as well as an almost compulsive sprinkling of references to major and minor figures. But Leibniz's philosophical eclecticism involves more than merely collecting and citing disparate philosophical ideas and thinkers. Leibniz's grander project is to show how such disparate views might be reconciled by revealing the deeper truths that his predecessors had only partially grasped or confusedly expressed. While also long overlooked, this aspect of Leibniz's thinking is now widely recognized by his commentators and has been explored in detail by others. Thus, Patrick Riley, for example, states plainly, "It was characteristic of Leibniz to try to reconcile apparently conflicting ideas, to take from each kind of thought that which was soundest and to synthesize it with seemingly incommensurable truths of other systems" (1996, 14). Likewise, Marcelo Dascal maintains

19. On Leibniz's irenicism, see also excellent discussions in Fouke (1992), Gold-  
enbaum (1999; 2002), and Mercer (2001).

that "[t]he Leibnizian goal, therefore, is neither to amalgamate in a 'system' divergent positions nor to merely destroy such divergences; it is rather to integrate them within a broader perspective that explains the reason and meaning of the detected opposition" (2008, 1). And finally, Christia Mercer, noting our previous point as well, emphasizes, "The key to understanding Leibniz's thought in the 1660's (and much of what he did later) is to recognize that he practiced a form of conciliatory eclecticism that fostered the accumulation and consideration of a wide variety of diverse ideas, that assumed an underlying truth beneath the various conflicting schools, and whose only stipulation was that the resulting collection be made consistent with Christian doctrine" (2001, 23).

When paired with the traditional dispute already sketched, Leibniz's overarching conciliatorism suggests a promising way of understanding Leibniz's notoriously puzzling statements concerning created substances. As is well known, in many passages Leibniz appears to imply that the world most fundamentally contains corporeal substances — that is, extended, material, organic unities essentially fitting the Aristotelian conception of substance. Thus, for example, in his much-discussed comments on his conversation with Michelangelo Fardella, Leibniz implies that the soul is properly thought of not as a substance but rather as a substantial form, writing in March 1690 that "the soul, properly and accurately speaking, is not a substance, but a substantial form, or primitive form existing in substances" (A IVB.1670/AG 105). Likewise, in notes prepared most likely around 1696 as part of his response to a dialogue on substance written by Christian Thomasius, Leibniz suggests that it is, strictly speaking, the unified person that should be counted as a substance, not the soul alone, writing, "This will do: *Substance* is an entity that is one and full. 'One' like a man, and not an army. 'Full' like a man, not a soul [*anima*], not a power [*virtus*]." <sup>20</sup> Finally, in a letter to Johann Bernoulli, dated

20. I owe my awareness of this passage to Daniel Garber, who cited it in a talk entitled "When Did Leibniz Discover Monads?" given to the Leibniz Society of North America in 2008. It is taken from notes Leibniz made in response

September 1698, Leibniz strikes a similar note, declaring "What I call an ... individual substance [*substantia singularis*] is not so much the soul, as it is the animal itself, or something analogous to it, endowed with a soul or form and an organic body" (GM III 542/AG 168).

In many other passages, however, Leibniz appears to imply that the world most fundamentally contains immaterial substances — that is, non-extended, mind-like "monads" essentially fitting the Platonic conception of substance. Thus, for example, in a letter written for Arnauld in 1686, he speaks plainly of the "soul being an individual substance" (A VI.iv.531; G 2:68). Likewise, in another passage from his comments on his conversation with Fardella, Leibniz implies that if human beings are conceived of as unions of souls and extended bodies, then they cannot be conceived of as substances, since if an "animal is conceived of as ... a body divisible and destructible, endowed with a soul, then it must be conceded that the animal is part of matter .... But it cannot then be conceded that it is a substance or an indestructible thing. And it is the same for man" (A IVB.1670/AG 105). Similarly, in a letter written to de Volder of 30 June 1704, Leibniz implies that genuine substances must be analogous to souls, or at least to minds, writing that "considering the matter carefully, we must say that there is nothing in things but simple substances, and in them, perception and appetite", a sentiment repeated in a still later text in which Leibniz writes bluntly, "it is evident in the end there are simple substances alone" (G II 270/AG 181, [ca. 1712] C 14/MP 175).

Finally, there are still other passages in which Leibniz appears to explicitly accept the existence of *both* corporeal and immaterial substances. Thus, for example, in a passage from the mid-1680s, he declares, all in the same paragraph, that "[a] substance is, for instance, a mind, a body", explaining, "Every substance has within it a kind of operation", but allowing that that operation either is "of the same thing on itself, in which case it is called reflection or thought,

to a dialogue concerning substance by Christian Thomasius, catalogued as IV.iii.1 in Bodemann (1966, 67) and reproduced in Utermöhlen (1979, 89). The translation is Garber's.

and such a substance is spiritual, *i. e.* a *mind*; or it is the operation of its various parts, and such a substance is called a *corporeal substance*" (A VI.iv.1506–1507/LOC 283–285; see also A IVB.1671/AG 105). That passage echoes another from the mid-1680s in which Leibniz suggests that "limited substances ... able to be acted upon" are of two sorts, namely, "living substance, which has in itself a soul or principle of operating" and "cognitive substance which acts in itself and is called a mind" (A IVA.531). Leibniz similarly appears to acknowledge candidates for both traditional views of substance in his much-discussed letter to de Volder of 20 June 1703, where he suggests that his metaphysics contains both the "monad" constituted by "the primitive entelechy or soul" and "the primary matter or primitive passive power", as well as "the animal, that is, the corporeal substance, which the dominating monad makes into one machine" (G II 252/AG 177). Finally, nearer to the end of his career, in a text most likely from around 1712, we find Leibniz noting with an air of indifference that "[a] substance is either simple, like a soul, which has no parts, or composite, like an animal, which is constituted of a soul and an organic body", a passage itself reminiscent of yet another text, apparently also drafted in 1712 but revised in 1715, in which Leibniz's spokesperson Philarete locates primitive active force in "what we call a soul, or in simple substance", while identifying that which is "composed of soul and mass" with "corporeal substance" (RML 451/AG 264).<sup>21</sup>

21. In the present essay, I mostly set aside the question of the historical development of Leibniz's views on substance (on which see especially Garber [2009]). While I take the issue of the development of Leibniz's views on substance to be both interesting and important, in light of the overlap in dating of passages in which he appears to commit himself alternately to corporeal and immaterial substances, as well as passages, such as those just cited, in which he appears to commit himself simultaneously to both, I don't think that a developmental account can, by itself, resolve the central tension of Leibniz's texts and metaphysics. With that said, a conciliatory interpretation is perfectly consistent with seeing aspects of Leibniz's views on substance as developing over the course of his long career. And, indeed, although I will not pursue the matter here, I think that consideration of the reception of Leibniz's conciliatory efforts might help to shed further light on the development and presentation of his views on substance.



None of these sets of passages, I think, absolutely rules out any particular interpretation of Leibniz's views on substance. Confronted with Leibniz's texts, every commentator must effectively make an inference to what she thinks is the best explanation of those texts. In the course of doing so, she may legitimately see some texts as being more revealing of Leibniz's position and others as being less so. Nonetheless, the textual challenges facing all the currently dominant interpretative strategies are easy to appreciate. Passages in which Leibniz seems to identify substances with unions of minds and bodies rather than with minds alone lend support to corporeal-substance readings at the expense of immaterial-substance readings. Passages in which Leibniz seems to identify substances with minds rather than unions point in exactly the opposite direction, lending support to immaterial-substance readings at the expense of corporeal-substance readings. Those two sets of passages together lend a measure of support to views of Leibniz as being deeply torn between two inconsistent conceptions of substance, either at a time or over time. The last set of passages, however, would seem to speak against such "inconsistent" or "developmental" readings, for, in those passages, Leibniz seems to think that he can, without difficulty, embrace both corporeal and immaterial substances at the same time.

A conciliatory reading suggests a promising way of making sense of the whole range of Leibniz's texts concerning substance. Passages in which Leibniz suggests that substances are modeled on unions of minds and bodies may, on such a reading, be understood as indicative of his desire to accommodate an essentially Aristotelian view of substance into his metaphysics — that is, as expressing his honest conviction that a broadly Aristotelian view of substance is philosophically tenable, as well as his hope that those independently committed to the position that you and I are most fundamentally unions of souls and bodies will find his metaphysical analysis of the created world acceptable. Passages in which Leibniz suggests that substances are modeled on immaterial minds may be read as indicative of Leibniz's desire to accommodate an essentially Platonic view of substance into his

metaphysics — that is, as expressing his honest conviction that a broadly Platonic view of substance is philosophically tenable, as well as his hope that those independently committed to the position that you and I are most fundamentally immaterial souls merely using bodies will find his metaphysical analysis of the created world acceptable. Finally, passages in which Leibniz suggests that substances may be modeled on unions of souls and bodies as well as on immaterial souls alone may be interpreted as stating Leibniz's philosophical convictions in their clearest terms, for those passages may be read as explicit statements of Leibniz's commitment to the simultaneous existence of candidates answering to the demands of *both* the Aristotelian and the Platonic conceptions of substance. A conciliatory reading, however, is not merely consistent with the full range of Leibniz's writings on substance. Just as significantly, it suggests a way of seeing *why* Leibniz should have wanted to say all the seemingly contradictory things that he does in fact say about substance without our having to attribute to him either crude philosophical inconsistencies or gross expositional infelicities. If Leibniz believed that he could reconcile two rival traditional views of substance, up to what he took to be the limits of philosophical inquiry, we shouldn't be surprised to find him sometimes emphasizing that his metaphysics is consistent with one traditional view of substance, sometimes with a rival traditional view of substance, and sometimes with both views.

If it is granted that a conciliatory approach might help to make better sense of Leibniz's otherwise puzzling statements concerning created substances, one will still want to know how Leibniz could possibly hope to accommodate both traditional conceptions of substance within a single, coherent metaphysical framework. As will become clearer as we go on, his efforts in this regard are, I think, best understood as resting on a careful two-stage metaphysical analysis of the created world, the first stage of which is intended to establish referents answering to the Aristotelian conception of substance and the second stage of which is intended to establish referents answering to the Platonic conception of substance. In order to bring out more clearly the consistency

of Leibniz's metaphysical analysis, as well as the ways in which it dovetails with his conciliatory ambitions, the next two sections will therefore look more closely at the two stages of Leibniz's metaphysical analysis of the created world while paying special attention to how the entities it reveals may be consistently related to one another.

### 3. A Conciliatory Metaphysics: Gross Bodies and Organic Unities

The first stage of Leibniz's metaphysical analysis of the created world aims to show that the created world is exhaustively constituted by — to pick a substance-neutral term — organic unities nested within organic unities *ad infinitum*. In showing that the world must *include* such entities, Leibniz's first-stage analysis is supposed to reveal candidates for substances for those who believe that we, as paradigmatic created substances, are most fundamentally unions of souls and bodies. In showing that the world is *exhaustively* constituted by such entities, Leibniz's first-stage analysis is intended to allow proponents of such a view of substance to identify us with organic unities without sacrificing the philosophically attractive thought that everything in the created world must either be a substance, an aspect of a substance (*e.g.*, matter or form), or immediately dependent upon substances (*e.g.*, properties and relations).

Support for the first stage of Leibniz's overarching metaphysical analysis may be thought of as coming in two distinguishable steps. The first step is most clearly motivated by an especially elegant line of thought that turns on the idea that being and unity are convertible, or, as Leibniz famously puts it in his letter to Arnauld of 30 April 1687, that "what is not truly *one* entity is not truly *one entity* either" (G II 97/PM 121). The central thrust of the argument is simply that extended bodies can be divided into two classes: those having genuine, organic, *per se* unity, like an extended living person, and those having merely accidental, non-organic, derivative unity, like a stack of logs or a pile of bricks. Assuming the convertibility of unity and being and the existence of extended bodies, Leibniz is able to argue that only those extended things that have real unity have real being and that

extended things that are not genuine organic unities have being only insofar as they are constituted by beings that do have genuine organic unity (*cf.* A IV.iv.1464/LOC 258–259; A IV.iv.1637/LOC 259–261). This first step would thus establish that gross inorganic bodies such as tables and chairs<sup>22</sup> must be constituted by organic unities on a par with fish and worms.<sup>23</sup>

The second step of Leibniz's first-stage analysis attempts to show that such organic unities must themselves be constituted by further organic unities *ad infinitum*. It is supported by a handful of relatively heterogeneous arguments. So, for one example, Leibniz argues that God's goodness leads him to create as many creatures with as great a variety as he can, including creatures living within creatures like organs within organisms (G III 356/WF 214; G VI 539–546/L 586–590; A VI.iv.1399/LOC 245). For another, Leibniz insists that an infinite packing of organisms is also implied by the infinite divisibility of matter, since each part of matter would have to be either an organism or constituted by organisms (G II 118/LA 152; A IV.1399; G VII 444). For yet another, Leibniz even suggests that then recent discoveries in the natural sciences offer empirical support for the conjecture that gross bodies are, in fact, chockablock with smaller organisms (G II 122/LA

22. It should perhaps be noted explicitly that nothing rules out the possibility of "a gross body" being constituted by a single organic unity (although, as we will see, for Leibniz, such a unity would itself have to be constituted by further organic unities). Such a case might be thought of as analogous to, say, the possible case of a single atom constituting a chair — a case that might be imagined to involve either a very large atom or a very small sitter. In order to keep distractions to a minimum, however, in what follows I'll ignore such cases and use the term "gross body" to denote an extended body which neither enjoys an organic unity nor is constituted by single organic unity.

23. This step should, I think, be understood as involving only a conditional claim, namely, that *if* there are gross bodies, *then* there must be organic unities, and as leaving open the possibility that there are neither gross bodies nor organic unities. Its being conditional reflects Leibniz's dual conviction that the existence of gross bodies and organic unities is only morally certain and that robust idealism is, in itself, a logically and even metaphysically coherent position. See, for example, A II.i.248–249/AG 3–5; A VI.iv.1500–1504/L 363–365; DM 14; and G VII 314/PM 81. For related discussion, see Levey (2003; 2007; 2008) and Rutherford (2008b).

156; G II 99/LA 124; A VI.iv.1988/L 278–9; G IV 469/L 433). The picture we are left with at the end of his second step, and thus at the end of Leibniz's first-stage analysis, is one according to which the world of everyday experience is thoroughly constituted by organic unities, which are themselves constituted by ever smaller organic unities to infinity – a picture of the world in which, as Daniel Garber has put it, there are “big bugs which contain smaller bugs, which contain smaller bugs still, and all the way down” (Garber 1985, 29; *cf.* Swift 1733, lns 337–340; De Morgan 1872, 2:191; Levey 2003, fn 35).

If we allow that such a picture would establish suitable candidates for the Aristotelian conception of substance, we will still want to know how exactly we are supposed to understand the relationship between the organic unities revealed by Leibniz's first-stage analysis and the gross bodies familiar to us from everyday experience. Although Leibniz is perhaps less clear on this point than we might have hoped, his core understanding of the relationship between gross bodies and organic unities is, I think, best understood simply as an instance of the philosophically familiar relation of “material” constitution.<sup>24</sup> In much the same way that, for example, a corpuscularian philosopher might hold that gross bodies are constituted by material atoms and we might hold that living creatures are constituted by living cells, Leibniz holds that gross bodies are constituted by organic unities. In order to tease out the implications of this suggestion, it should be helpful to consider four points of analogy between a generic corpuscularian analysis of the world into material atoms and Leibniz's first-stage analysis of the world into organic unities.

First, the corpuscularian philosopher may emphasize that to say that a gross body – my wristwatch, for example – is constituted by atoms is not to say that it is identical to any sum or set of atoms, for the familiar reason that my watch and the sum of atoms which constitutes

it may have very different identity conditions and thus may have very different persistence conditions.<sup>25</sup> The existence of my watch presupposes, at the least, a certain ordered arrangement of its parts that is not presupposed by the existence of the sum of atoms constituting it. Hitting my watch with a hammer may thus destroy my watch but not the sum of atoms out of which it is made. Likewise, for Leibniz, the existence of an inorganic gross body presupposes a certain accidental unity, “perhaps a contact or even running together”, that is not presupposed by the existence of any sum of organic unities (A VI.iv.1506/LOC 283). Thus, although for Leibniz any gross material object – say a block of cheese – must be constituted by tiny organisms nested within one another to infinity, no block of cheese can be simply identical to some organisms or to a sum of organisms, since by grating, slicing or chopping, one may destroy the block of cheese without destroying its constituting organisms.

Second, the corpuscularian philosopher may maintain that at least some of the putatively intrinsic properties we commonly attribute to gross bodies – for example, their so-called “secondary qualities” – cannot be fully reduced to the properties and relations of their constituting atoms if the experiential states of perceivers are set aside.<sup>26</sup> So, for example, the corpuscularian philosopher might reasonably suggest that the yellowness and sourness of a lemon cannot be fully reduced to the properties and relations enjoyed by its constituting atoms *per se* but must rather be understood as resulting from the interaction of atoms and sentient perceivers. Leibniz similarly suggests that many of the intrinsic properties commonly attributed to

24. I've placed “material” in scare quotes as a reminder that it should not be assumed that the relation of material constitution must involve *relata* that are material in any contemporary sense. The word ‘material’ in ‘material constitution’ primarily connotes a contrast with form, not a contrast with mind.

25. For discussion and defense of the thesis that the constitution relation should not be taken to be the identity relation, see, for starters, Baker (1997; 2007), Chappell (1990), Fine (2003), Johnston (1992), Lowe (1983; 1995), and Thomson (1998). For a helpful entry point into contemporary treatments of material constitution, see Rea (1997a) and Wasserman (2009).

26. This way of formulating the point should allow us to set aside, without loss, some complexities that arise at the intersection of concerns over supervenience, grounding and constitution; for discussion of such matters, see, for starters, Zimmerman (1995), Rea (1997b), Sider (1999), and Bennett (2004).

gross bodies cannot be fully reduced to the properties and relations of their constituting organic unities if the experiential states of perceivers are bracketed. Thus, for example, Leibniz insists that the smooth, finitely determinate shapes commonly attributed to gross bodies are at least partly mind-dependent and cannot be attributed to the actually infinitely divided collections of organic unities which constitute them, since “from the fact that no body is so small that it is not actually divided into parts ... it follows that no determinate shape can be assigned to any body ... so shape involves something imaginary” (A IV.iv.1622/PM 81; cf. A IV.iv.1648/AG 34).<sup>27</sup> Thus, for Leibniz, not only (say) the stop sign’s red color but also its precise octagonal shape must involve “something imaginary and relative to our perception” (DM 12).

Third, even while maintaining the non-reducibility of some properties of gross bodies, the corpuscularian philosopher may insist that gross bodies nonetheless immediately derive or inherit at least some of their properties from their underlying constituents.<sup>28</sup> So, for example, she might hold that my watch immediately derives its mass from the masses of the atoms which make it up or, to change examples, that the lamp on my desk directly inherits its properties of being heavy, shiny, and subject to oxidation from the properties of the lump of metal out of which it is made. Leibniz similarly maintains that, although some properties of gross bodies cannot be fully reduced to the organic unities that constitute them, nonetheless gross bodies do immediately derive or inherit some of their properties from the organic unities which make them up. This thread in Leibniz’s thinking about the relationship between gross bodies and constituting organisms plays an especially important role in his attempts to provide an intelligible foundation for his dynamics. He thus argues that the active powers of gross bodies — their intrinsic positive powers of acting — can be made intelligible only if it is recognized that they are constituted by genuine organic unities endowed with active substantial forms. Likewise,

27. For further discussion of this point, see especially Levey (1998; 2005).

28. For an attempt to spell out this intuitive idea in greater detail, see Baker (2000, 46–57), but see also Rea (2002, 613–614).

he suggests that the passive powers of bodies — their intrinsic powers of resisting motion and penetration — can be made intelligible only when it is recognized that they are constituted by genuine organic unities endowed with passive matter (GM VI 240–242/L 440–441; G IV 395–396/AG 252–253). Indeed, it is primarily in this way that Leibniz sees, going in one direction, his physics as lending support to his re-introduction of organic unities, and, going in the other direction, his postulation of those unities as providing intelligible foundations for his much-vaunted work in dynamics.

Finally, fourth, the corpuscularian philosopher may maintain that material atoms are, in an important sense, metaphysically privileged with respect to things like desks and chairs or, to put the same point in different terms, that atoms are, in some sense, metaphysically prior to the gross bodies they constitute.<sup>29</sup> In support of this contention, she may call attention to ways in which the existence of gross bodies seems to presuppose the existence of atoms but in which the existence of atoms does not seem to presuppose the existence of gross bodies. So, for example, she might argue that while the existence of my chair presupposes the existence of the atoms that constitute it, the existence of those atoms does not presuppose the existence my chair. It should be noted that in suggesting that atoms are metaphysically prior to things like desks and chairs, the corpuscularian needn’t deny the seemingly Moorean fact that desks and chairs exist, for in saying that atoms are metaphysically prior to office furniture, she may be understood as saying that atoms are, in an important sense, more fundamental than desks and chairs, without committing herself to the far more radical claim that the chair I take myself to be sitting on, and the desk I take myself to be writing at, do not exist at all.

29. On the notion of metaphysical priority, see the important recent work by Jonathan Schaffer (2010; 2009; 2003). Like Schaffer, I take the notion of metaphysical priority to be an intuitive notion structured by formal constraints and explicable via clear examples. Unlike Schaffer, however, I think it is less clear that the notion of metaphysical priority is completely univocal (cf. Schaffer 2009, 376–377). Indeed, one might, I think, reasonably see the dispute between Platonists and Aristotelians as being at least partially rooted in differing conceptions of metaphysical priority.

Leibniz's first-stage analysis of the created world similarly allows him to maintain that organic unities are, in an important sense, metaphysically prior to gross bodies. In support of this contention, Leibniz may invoke some of the very same considerations that he takes to establish the existence of organic unities in the first place. More specifically, his argument from the convertibility of being and unity turns precisely on the thought that organic unities enjoy a true unity, indicative of true being, not enjoyed by the gross bodies they constitute. He may thus argue that organic unities are metaphysically privileged with respect to the gross bodies they constitute. Here as well, it should be noted that the claim that organic unities are metaphysically prior to gross bodies needn't be understood as entailing the further claim that gross bodies do not exist. Like the corpuscularian, Leibniz can maintain that things like desks and chairs are constituted by metaphysically more privileged entities without denying the seemingly obvious fact that desks and chairs exist.

Having drawn on an extended analogy in order to flesh out the implications of the relation of material constitution and show how it may be applied to Leibniz's first-stage metaphysical analysis, an important *dissimilarity* between the corpuscularian's atoms and Leibniz's organic unities should be made clear. It is characteristic of atomism to suppose that atoms are privileged in virtue of their having no parts or requisites. Atomists can therefore consistently hold that the asymmetry of the constitution relation is itself indicative of ontological priority. That is to say, they can maintain that the very fact that one set of entities is constituted by another set of entities is sufficient to show that the latter set of entities is metaphysically more fundamental than the former set of entities. The Aristotelian tradition is, in general, committed to swimming against this reductive current. In taking embodied human beings and living creatures as paradigmatic substances, Aristotelians commit themselves to allowing that substances typically have, in some sense, both integral parts and metaphysical requisites. Socrates, for example, has both hands and feet as integral parts and form and matter as metaphysical requisites. They

must therefore deny that the asymmetry of the constitution relation entails an asymmetry of ontological priority — that is, they must deny that the mere fact that x's are constituted by y's shows that x's are less metaphysically privileged than y's.

In the course of arguing that organic unities are privileged with respect to gross bodies, Leibniz must similarly deny that the asymmetry of the constitution relation entails an asymmetry of ontological priority. As we've seen, organic unities are privileged for Leibniz, minimally, because they are genuine unities. Since they are themselves constituted by further organic unities, and presuppose the existence of matter and form, it is evident that Leibniz believes that true unities may have, in some sense, integral parts and metaphysical requisites, and that whatever privileges organic unities enjoy, or might be supposed to enjoy, those privileges do not depend upon their not having integral parts and metaphysical requisites. Indeed, although it threatens getting ahead of ourselves, it is worth noting that if Leibniz's organic unities are taken to be substances, his first-stage analysis will imply not only that substances may have parts and requisites but that they may have parts and requisites that are themselves *substances*. This is admittedly a possibility that Aquinas, together with other so-called "unitarians", appears to reject (at least in non-miraculous cases) ([ST I, q. 76, aa 3–4] 1981, 375–379). But the view that substances might have other substances as parts or requisites was not uncommon among Aristotelian Scholastics more generally. (Indeed, Marilyn McCord Adams describes Aquinas's "unitarian contention" as "definitely a minority report" (1987, 647).) Thus so-called "pluralists" commonly maintained that substances may have other substances as metaphysical requisites. Ockham, for example, suggests that human beings have substantial sentient bodies as metaphysical requisites and, indeed, that those sentient bodies in turn have substantial corporeal bodies as their metaphysical requisites ([Second Quodlibet, qq. 10–11] 1991, 132–139).<sup>30</sup> Scotus goes a step further, arguing that substances may have other

30. For discussion of pluralist views in general, and Ockham's position in particular, see Adams (1987, 633–670). See also Normore (2011, 226–227).



substances not only as requisites but also as integral parts. He thus maintains that the human body requisite to a human being is itself constituted by integral parts, including organs, that are themselves substances. Indeed, in a rather striking anticipation of Leibniz, Scotus even suggests that some of a human body's integral parts may in turn be constituted by further substantial integral parts — organs within organs, as it were ([QMet, VII.20] 1991–2006, IV: 381–394).<sup>31</sup> Although there are many intriguing lessons that might be drawn from consideration of the pluralist tradition, the most important point for our present purposes is simply that Leibniz could reasonably suppose that the constitution of organic unities by further parts and requisites, even substantial parts and requisites, would not preclude the acceptance of organic unities as paradigmatic, metaphysically privileged substances among proponents of the later Aristotelian Scholastic tradition.

#### 4. A Conciliatory Metaphysics: Organic Unities and Immaterial Simples

The second stage of Leibniz's metaphysical analysis seeks to establish that the organic unities of his first-stage analysis must themselves be constituted by — again, to pick a substance-neutral term — immaterial simples. In showing that the world must *include* immaterial simples, Leibniz's second-stage analysis is supposed to reveal candidates for substances for those who believe that we, as paradigmatic created substances, are most fundamentally immaterial souls. In showing that the world is *exhaustively* constituted by such entities, Leibniz's second-stage analysis aims to allow proponents of such a view of substance to identify us with immaterial souls without sacrificing the attractive thought that everything in the created world must either be a substance, an aspect of a substance, or immediately dependent upon substances.

Support for the second stage of Leibniz's overarching metaphysical analysis might again be thought of as coming in two distinguishable steps. The first step infers the existence of immaterial natures, or

31. For discussion of Scotus's pluralism and a lucid defense of the view attributed to him here, see Ward (forthcoming).

"substantial forms", from the existence of organic unities. Thus, for example, in an essay entitled "On the Present World", dated by the Akademie editors to between March 1684 and spring 1686, Leibniz writes:

Every real entity is either a unity *per se*, or an accidental entity. A *entity (unity) per se* is, for instance, a man; an *accidental entity (unity)* — for instance, a woodpile, a machine — is what is only a unity by aggregation, and there is no real union in it other than a connection .... But in an entity *per se* some real union is required, consisting not in the situation and motion of parts, as in a chain, a house or a ship, but in some unique individual principle and subject of its attributes and operations, which in us is called a soul, and in every body a substantial form, provided it is a unity *per se*. (A VI.iv.1506/LOC 283; see also G II 71–72/LA 88; G VII 444)

The line of thought Leibniz expresses here is, I think, best understood as a kind of transcendental argument: extended *per se* unities presuppose, as a necessary condition for their existence, the presence of immaterial principles — that is, souls or substantial forms. Because it is a transcendental argument, Leibniz can afford to be ambivalent about how exactly the soul contributes to the unity of an organic being. It might be through a pre-established harmony (G IV 77–87), through a natural incompleteness (G III 357), or even through philosophically transcendent "substantial chains", a possibility he entertains most famously in the Des Bosses correspondence (e.g., G II 285–521/LDB 225–235). What is most important for Leibniz, however, is not so much *how* exactly souls or substantial forms are in fact caught up in providing unity but rather that it is granted on all sides that there couldn't be organic unities without there being formal natures.<sup>32</sup>

32. Whether or not Leibniz's system actually affords him the resources to account for the *per se* unity of corporeal substances without appealing to supernatural "substantial bonds" is a difficult and interesting question that will not be taken

The second step of Leibniz's second-stage analysis moves from the relatively straightforward idea that organic unities presuppose immaterial simples to the more radical suggestion that even organic unities must ultimately be exhaustively constituted by such immaterial natures. In a well-known passage that has been entitled *Metaphysical Consequences of the Principle of Reason* and dated to 1712, Leibniz writes:

A substance is either simple, such as a soul, which has no parts, or it is composite, such as an animal, which consists of a soul and an organic body. But an organic body, like every other body, is merely an aggregate of animals or other things which are living and therefore organic ... from which it is evident that all bodies are finally resolved into living things, and that what, in the analysis of substances, exist ultimately are simple substances — namely, souls, or, if you prefer a more general term, monads, which are without parts. For even though every simple substance has an organic body which corresponds to it ... yet by itself it is without parts. And because an organic body, or any other body whatsoever, can again be resolved into substances endowed with organic bodies, it is evident that in the end there are simple substances alone, and that in them are the sources of all things .... (C 13–14/PM 175; see also G II 72/LA 88; AG 207; AG 213; G II 267)

The argument of the passage suggests that organic unities derive their being from their unifying forms and matter. As we have seen, however, the matter of any organic being is, according to Leibniz, itself a collection of organic beings, and consequently those organic beings will in turn derive their being from their unifying forms and matter. Leibniz suggests that if, at every stage of analysis, the immaterial unifying form of an organic unity is set aside and its matter further analyzed in terms

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up here. For helpful discussion, see Adams (1994, 292–307), LDB xlv–lxxix, and Rozemond (1997).

of form and matter, at the end of analysis, we must arrive at immaterial forms alone. Put in slightly different terms, which Leibniz also uses, an organic unity — a composite of form and matter — must “borrow” its reality from its form and its matter (see G II 261, 267). But its matter must in turn borrow its reality from the organisms that constitute it, and each of those organisms must in turn borrow its reality from its form and matter. Assuming an infinite analysis, one might plausibly suppose that the resulting regress must ultimately yield an exhaustive analysis of organic bodies into immaterial simples that do not borrow their reality from any other (created) thing.<sup>33</sup>

If it is allowed that Leibniz's second-stage analysis of the world into immaterial simples would establish suitable candidates for the Platonic conception of substance, we will still want to know, as before, how exactly we are supposed to understand the relationship between the organic unities revealed by the first stage of Leibniz's analysis and the immaterial simples revealed by its second stage. Although, again, Leibniz is perhaps less clear on this point than we might have hoped, his core understanding of the relationship between organic unities and immaterial simples can also be understood in terms of the philosophically familiar relation of material constitution. To bring this out

33. For related discussion, see Adams (1994, 324), Arthur (1998; 2011), Rutherford (1995, 156–159), and Levey (2007, 75–85). It is worth noting that the results of Leibniz's second-stage analysis puts further pressure on the conditional premise of his first-stage analysis (see note 23). After all, one might wonder, if metaphysical simples are themselves unities, why can't extended bodies be immediately constituted by simple unities rather than organic unities? The worry is no threat to Leibniz's conciliatory account of substance, since he could address it by simply redistributing the weight of his first-stage argument, allowing that gross bodies may be constituted by either organic unities or simples, and arguing that we nonetheless have good evidence (from principles of plenitude, empirical discoveries, etc.) that they are in fact constituted by the former. Although further investigation into why Leibniz feels entitled to the stronger conditional would quickly take us too far away from our present concerns, it is perhaps worth noting that he could not unreasonably dig in his heels here and insist that the convertibility of unity and being entails that the existence of real extended gross bodies presupposes the existence of extended unities (even if the existence of extended unities does not itself presuppose the existence of further extended unities) (cf. A VI.iv.1670/AG 105).

more clearly, it may be helpful to see how the four points of analogy sketched above may also be applied in fleshing out Leibniz's understanding of the relationship between organic unities and immaterial simples.

First, just as to say that gross bodies are constituted by organic unities is not to say that they are identical to sums or sets of organic unities, so to say that organic unities are constituted by immaterial simples is not to say that they are identical to sums or sets of simples. And this for essentially the same reason as before, namely, that organic unities and sums of immaterial simples have very different identity conditions and thus very different persistence conditions. So, on the one hand, since the existence of an organic unity naturally presupposes a certain degree or kind of unity not presupposed by a mere collection of simples *per se*, it appears that any organic unity could, in principle, be destroyed without destroying the collection of simples which constitutes it (G II 403/LDB 167). On the other hand, and conversely, as it were, since Leibniz implies that an organic unity may increase and diminish over the course of its existence, it appears that an organic unity could, in principle, survive the loss and destruction of at least some of the members of the collection which actually constitutes it (G IV 480/AG 140–141; GM III 560/AG 170). It therefore appears to be both the case that, at least in principle, a Leibnizian organic unity — a bunny, say — might survive the loss of some of its constituting simples, and that its constituting simples might survive the destruction of the bunny they constitute.

Second, just as many of the intrinsic properties commonly attributed to gross bodies cannot be fully reduced to the properties and relations of their constituting organic unities if the experiential states of perceivers are set aside, so likewise many of the intrinsic properties that may be attributed to organic unities cannot be fully reduced to the properties and relations of their constituting simples if the experiential states of perceivers are bracketed. This point comes out perhaps most strikingly in Leibniz's claim that we cannot attribute to immaterial simples *per se* even the everywhere-divided extension

attributable to organic unities (G II 183/L 519; G II 282/AG 185). Since Leibniz denies that simples might be arranged in an independent absolute space and insists that all inter-substantial relations are at least partially mind-dependent, he is committed to the view that the very extension of organic unities must be at least partially dependent upon the perceptual states of perceivers.<sup>34</sup> Put in slightly different terms, for Leibniz, the extension of organic unities must supervene not merely on the intrinsic properties of simples *per se* but on the intrinsic properties of simples together with the perceptual states of perceivers (just as the continuous extension attributed to gross bodies must supervene on the properties of organic unities *per se* together with the perceptual states of perceivers). The move from immaterial simples to organic unities, like the move from organic unities to gross bodies, thus exposes for Leibniz an important contribution on the part of perceivers.<sup>35</sup>

Third, just as gross bodies must immediately derive or inherit some of their properties from their constituting organic unities, so organic unities must immediately derive or inherit some of their properties from their constituting immaterial simples. In particular, Leibniz suggests that the derivative active and passive powers of extended bodies must ultimately be derived from the primitive active and passive powers of immaterial simples. Thus, for example, in a famous letter to de Volder of 20 June 1703, Leibniz writes:

34. I take for granted here the common view that, for Leibniz, (non-miraculous) inter-monic relations presuppose perceptual states of perceivers; for a defense of such a view, and a helpful entry point into the literature on Leibniz's subtle and complex treatment of relations, see Mugnai (1992).

35. It shouldn't, I think, be assumed that extended things cannot be constituted by unextended things. Contemporary metaphysicians, for example, often suppose that spatially and temporally extended things have spatially and temporally unextended events as their most basic parts (*e.g.*, Sider 2001, 110–119), and contemporary philosophers of physics often begin with the assumption that space-time itself may be treated as a four-dimensional continuous manifold of (unextended) space-time points (*e.g.*, Friedman 1983, 32–46). It is perhaps worth noting that it is a consequence of the present reading that, for Leibniz, the soul must have a specifiable location — a consequence that he insists upon, for example, in maintaining that the “soul” of a worm cut in half must always be in one half or the other (G II 100/AG 88; *cf.* A II.xii.176).

Properly and rigorously speaking, perhaps one cannot say that the primitive entelechy impels the mass of its body. Rather, it is joined with a primitive passive power that it completes, that is, with which it constitutes a monad .... However, in the phenomena, that is, in the resulting aggregate, everything is explained mechanically, and ... [w]e need consider nothing but derivative forces in these phenomena, once it is agreed where they come from, namely, the phenomena of aggregates come from the reality of monads. (G II 250/AG 175–176; see also GM VI 236–237/AG 119–120; G IV 479/AG 139; G VI 588–589/AG 264)

Leibniz's thought here, I suggest, is simply that the active and passive powers enjoyed by extended entities must be immediately derived or inherited from the active and passive powers enjoyed by their constituting elements in much the way that the mass of my desk might be thought to be immediately derived or inherited from the masses of its constituting atoms. On such a reading, organic unities and gross bodies would ultimately owe their powers of acting and resisting to the powers of the metaphysical "atoms" that make them up. In this way, just as the reality of organic unities and gross bodies ultimately presupposes the reality of metaphysical atoms, so the reality of derivative forces, for Leibniz, presupposes the reality of primitive forces (G II 252/AG 177).

Finally, fourth, just as Leibniz's first-stage metaphysical analysis allows him to maintain that organic unities are metaphysically privileged with respect to gross bodies, so his second-stage analysis suggests a way in which immaterial simples might be thought to be metaphysically prior to the organic unities they constitute. In support of such a contention, a proponent of the Platonic conception of substance might draw upon the very line of thought at work in the second step of the second stage of Leibniz's metaphysical analysis, for Leibniz's so-called "borrowed reality" argument suggests an intuitive sense in which the

existence of organic unities seems to presuppose the existence of metaphysical simples in a way that the existence of metaphysical simples does not seem to presuppose the existence of organic unities. A Platonist could thus find clear reasons for maintaining that there is an important sense in which the existence of organic unities is derivative upon the existence of the immaterial simples that constitute them. As before, we might note that in doing so, she would not need to deny the existence of organic unities, for saying that immaterial simples are metaphysically privileged with respect to organic unities is perfectly consistent with insisting that organic unities nonetheless exist, just as suggesting that pieces of furniture are constituted by physical atoms is perfectly consistent with insisting that desks and chairs exist.

Leibniz's second-stage analysis thus shows how his metaphysics might be reconciled with a Platonic view of substance. Those who take souls as paradigms of created substances may view Leibniz's immaterial simples as being the world's privileged, true substances. Does it, at the same time, however, show that his metaphysics cannot, after all, be reconciled with an Aristotelian view of substance? That is to say, does Leibniz's suggestion that organic unities are constituted by immaterial simples rule out the possibility of Aristotelians taking organic unities to be the world's privileged, true substances? Significantly for Leibniz's conciliatory efforts, the short answer, I think, is "No", for as we have already seen, it was never essential to the Aristotelian view to deny that substances may have integral parts and metaphysical requisites — to deny, for example, that Socrates has hands and feet, a substantial form and matter. Nor is it essential to the Aristotelian view to deny that substances are, in some sense, ontologically dependent upon their parts and requisites. Indeed, as we've seen, pluralists such as Ockham and Scotus openly embraced the idea that paradigmatic substances require parts and requisites, but even Unitarians such as Aquinas could allow that while the embodied Socrates may lose a hand or some weight and still persist, he could not exist without any parts or without his substantial form and a body. What turns out to be crucial to the Aristotelian view therefore is not any denial of composition but

rather an affirmation that in the case of paradigmatic substances, the whole is nonetheless privileged with respect to its parts and requisites, minimally, but not necessarily exclusively, in virtue of the whole's being a true unity. Having carefully carved out a space in his metaphysics for true unities corresponding to embodied human beings and other living creatures, Leibniz could thus reasonably suppose that later Aristotelians should not be especially troubled by his suggestion that those unities are themselves constituted by parts and requisites.

Where, then, does Leibniz's full metaphysical analysis leave us with respect to his considered view of substance? If we treat the concept of substance, for a moment, as a purely philosophical notion, we can set aside cautionary talk of "candidates" and say cleanly that Leibniz's two-stage metaphysical analysis of the created world, in keeping with his philosophical eclecticism, establishes the existence of *both* corporeal and immaterial substances. Both sets of entities satisfy standard intensional requirements on substances: members of both sets are, for example, subjects of predication, admit of rigorous identity conditions through change, and are centers of natural activity. Both sets of entities further correspond to standard — albeit different — extensional paradigms of substance: the one to embodied humans, the other to human souls. Finally, since organic unities are constituted by immaterial simples, both sets of entities can exist at the same time. Indeed, from a philosophical point of view, the coexistence of the members of both sets is no more problematic than is the coexistence of, say, me and my cells, or my desk and the fundamental particles that make it up. It's not without reason that Leibniz feels entitled to speak of both corporeal and immaterial *substances*, even in the same paragraph or sentence; his metaphysics is a carefully worked-out defense of the philosophical tenability of both.

As we noted at the outset, however, the concept of substance was not, in the early modern era, a purely philosophical notion, and Leibniz's earnest and understandable desire to foster not only philosophical but also religious and even political toleration introduces a nagging wrinkle that is nonetheless important for understanding the

full range of his texts. In keeping with his overarching conciliatorism, Leibniz should maintain that the organic unities and immaterial simples revealed by his two-stage philosophical analysis are, strictly speaking, philosophical *candidates* for the true substances of the created world. Leibniz's metaphysics entails that everyone should concede that both sets of entities exist and that both sets of entities satisfy all philosophical requirements for being substances. Insofar as the notion of substance is bound up with extra-philosophical concerns, however, he is evidently willing to allow that those concerns might tip the scales for some interlocutors in favor of counting one set of candidates as the world's uniquely true substances at the expense of the other set. From a philosophical point of view, this aspect of Leibniz's account is something of a distraction. It is nonetheless essential for understanding the many texts in which Leibniz emphasizes how his metaphysics might be accepted by particular interlocutors, suggesting in some passages that his metaphysics is consistent with taking unions of souls and bodies to be the world's unique, true substances and in others that his metaphysics is consistent with taking immaterial souls to be the world's unique, true substances. There is nothing false or dishonest in such statements, since Leibniz takes his metaphysics, in fact, to be consistent with both views (*cf.* Adams [1994, 307; 1996, 118–122] and Russell [1937, 151f]). Nonetheless, Leibniz's tendency to state his own position in the terms in which he thinks it can be accepted by different audiences has clearly helped to obscure his systematic, philosophical account of substance and, indeed, ironically, has helped to spur a debate among his contemporary commentators that mirrors the dispute that his philosophical account of substance was intended to ameliorate.

### Conclusion

For roughly the past twenty-five years or so, no topic has more greatly vexed Leibniz's commentators than his treatment of the category of substance. Encouraged by several now canonical texts, including the so-called "Monadology" and the "Principles of Nature and Grace",



Leibniz has long been read as endorsing a picture according to which substances are modeled on immaterial souls or substantial forms. Increased attention to the full range of Leibniz's writings, however, has led some commentators to read him as endorsing a view of substance modeled on organic unities of souls and bodies for much, or even all, of his long career. The felt tension between these two models of substance, and their persistence in Leibniz's texts, has recently driven some commentators to the once radical conclusion that Leibniz's mature writings — his writings from the mid-1680s to the end of his life — simply do not tell “an interpretative story that is consistent ... in the sense that it contains no deep and serious contradictions” (Wilson 1999, 373).

The aim of the present essay has been to sketch an alternative approach to interpreting Leibniz's writings on substance. Towards that end, the first section sketched a long-standing dispute over whether created substances should be paradigmatically identified with unions of souls and bodies or with souls alone. The second section suggested that Leibniz's initially puzzling treatment of substance begins to make better sense when read against the backdrop of that traditional dispute and his own overarching conciliatorism. The third section focused on Leibniz's attempt to establish candidates for the Aristotelian conception of substance, arguing that, for Leibniz, the gross bodies of everyday experience are (materially) constituted by organic unities meeting the essential demands of the Aristotelian conception of substance. The fourth section focused on Leibniz's attempt to establish candidates for the Platonic conception of substance, arguing that, for Leibniz, organic unities are themselves (materially) constituted by immaterial simples meeting the essential demands of the Platonic conception of substance. The essay as a whole thus suggests that Leibniz's approach to substance, while subtle in its details, is nonetheless simple in its motivation: Leibniz's aim is to reconcile, as far as possible, two traditionally rival conceptions of substance by revealing what he sees as the hidden, deeper philosophical truth common to them both.<sup>36</sup>

36. Earlier versions of this paper were presented to audiences at the University of Helsinki; Oxford University; the University of California, San Diego; the

### List of Abbreviations

- A = G. W. Leibniz. 1923–. *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (Darmstadt and Berlin: Akademie-Verlag). Reference is to series, volume, and page.
- AG = G. W. Leibniz. 1989. *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and tr. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett).
- C = G. W. Leibniz. 1975. *Opusculs et Fragments inédits de Leibniz*, ed. L. Couturat (Paris: Durand, 1857; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms).
- DA = G. W. Leibniz. 2008. *The Art of Controversies*, ed. and tr. M. Dascal, with the cooperation of Q. Racionero and A. Cardoso (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag).
- DM = G. W. Leibniz. 1686. *Discourse on Metaphysics* in G IV 427–463. Reference is to section number.
- DSR = G. W. Leibniz. 1992. *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers, 1675–1676*, ed. and tr. G. H. R. Parkinson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- G = G. W. Leibniz. 1875–1890. *Die Philosophische Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1960). Reference is to volume and page.
- GM = G. W. Leibniz. 1849–1863. *Leibnizens mathematische Schriften*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt (?) (Berlin and Halle: Asher and Schmidt; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1971). Reference is to volume and page.
- Grua = G. W. Leibniz. 1948. *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, ed. G. Grua, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires; reprinted New York: Garland, 1985).
- H = G. W. Leibniz. 1985. *Theodicy*, trans. E. M. Huggard (LaSalle, IL: Open Court).
- L = G. W. Leibniz. 1969. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. and tr. L. E. Loemker, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht: Reidel).

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- LA = G. W. Leibniz. 1967. *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, ed. and tr. H. T. Mason (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- LDB = G. W. Leibniz. 2007. *The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence*, ed. and tr. B. Look and D. Rutherford (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- LOC = G. W. Leibniz. 2002. *The Labyrinth of the Continuum: Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672–1686*, ed. and tr. R. T. W. Arthur (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- NE = G. W. Leibniz. 1996. *New Essays on Human Understanding*, tr. and ed. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Reference is to book, chapter, section.
- PD = G. W. Leibniz. 1710. *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason* in G VI 49–101. Reference is to passage number.
- PM = G. W. Leibniz. 1973. *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, tr. Mary Morris, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.).
- RML = G. W. Leibniz. 1955. *Malebranche et Leibniz: Relations personnelles*, ed. A. Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin).
- WF = G. W. Leibniz. 2006. *Leibniz's 'New System' and Associated Contemporary Texts*, tr. and ed. R. S. Woolhouse and R. Francks (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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